

PROTOCOLS FOR HANDLING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN DAY CARE SERVICES

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October 1990



**CHILD WELFARE
SERVICES**



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Guidelines For Handling Child Abuse and Neglect In Day Care Services

These guidelines are for the use of staff and caregivers in day care centres, family day homes, nursery schools, and drop-in centres and for the use of Day Care Programs and Child Welfare Services staff in Alberta Family and Social Services. The guidelines were developed jointly by Headquarters Day Care Programs and Child Welfare Services in consultation with regional staff in both programs.

1. Introduction

Under the provision of the Child Welfare Act, any person who suspects a child may be abused or neglected has a legal obligation to report the matter immediately to Child Welfare Services.

The Child Welfare Act states:

"For the purposes of this Act, a child is in need of protective services if there are reasonable and probable grounds to believe that the survival, security or development of the child is endangered because of any of the following:

- (a) the child has been abandoned or lost;
- (b) the guardian of the child is dead and the child has no other guardian;
- (c) the guardian of the child is unable or unwilling to provide the child with necessities of life, including failing to obtain for the child or to permit the child to receive essential medical, surgical or other remedial treatment that has been recommended by a physician;
- (d) the child has been or there is substantial risk that the child will be physically injured or sexually abused by the guardian of the child;
- (e) the guardian of the child is unable or unwilling to protect the child from physical injury or sexual abuse;
- (f) the child has been emotionally injured by the guardian of the child;
- (g) the guardian of the child is unable or unwilling to protect the child from emotional injury;

- (h) the guardian of the child has subjected the child to or is unable or unwilling to protect the child from cruel and unusual treatment or punishment;
- (i) the condition or behaviour of the child prevents the guardian of the child from providing the child with adequate care appropriate to meet the child's needs."

These guidelines describe the responsibilities of people who report and the role of authorities who investigate reports. Information about recognizing and preventing child abuse and neglect is contained in item #6.

While reporting suspected child abuse is a sensitive and difficult issue, the law is designed to protect children because they are unable to protect themselves. Parents have the primary responsibility to protect children but when parents fail to do so, the government intervenes on behalf of the child.

The guiding principle is the safety and well-being of the child. The question to ask is "Is there reasonable and probable grounds to believe a child is at risk?" Wherever there is a doubt, it must be reported even if there are no concrete signs or physical evidence of abuse or neglect. Once the report is made, Child Welfare Services of Alberta Family and Social Services will determine what should be done.

The name of a person who reports pursuant to the Child Welfare Act shall not be disclosed or communicated to any person without the consent in writing of the Minister of Family and Social Services.

No action lies against a person reporting unless the reporting is done maliciously or without reasonable or probable grounds for the belief.

Any person who fails to report is guilty of an offense and liable to a fine.

2. Reporting

- WHEN A PERSON SUSPECTS A CHILD IS ABUSED OR NEGLECTED, THE PERSON MUST REPORT IMMEDIATELY BY CALLING THE DISTRICT OFFICE OF CHILD WELFARE SERVICES LISTED IN THE TELEPHONE DIRECTORY UNDER GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA, FAMILY AND SOCIAL SERVICES, OR BY DIALING "0" AND ASKING FOR ZENITH 1234.

- A person must report to Child Welfare Services regardless of how the information was obtained and regardless of advice or direction not to report.
- Once the report is made, Child Welfare Services will determine what should be done next. The person reporting should not discuss the incident with any other person until given permission by Child Welfare Services or the police to do so.
- The responsibility for investigating reports of child abuse or neglect rests with Child Welfare Services and/or the police. When a report is received, a Child Welfare Services worker will determine whether:
 - the parent or guardian is the alleged perpetrator, or
 - the alleged perpetrator is someone other than the parent or guardian - for example, a day care worker, family day home staff or provider or some other person.

2.1 Parent as Alleged Perpetrator

- If the Child Welfare Services worker determines that the parent is the alleged perpetrator, or if the parent is unable or unwilling to protect the child, Child Welfare Services is responsible for further action.
- Where the parent is the perpetrator, there is no requirement for Child Welfare Services to contact or notify Day Care Services staff or the day care centre or family day home of the report or investigation. The Child Welfare Services worker may, however, request the assistance of Day Care Programs staff in providing information and/or access to the child. The Child Welfare Services worker may contact the Regional Manager of Day Care Services and/or the day care centre or family day home.

2.2 Alleged Perpetrator is Not Parent or Guardian

- When Child Welfare Services receives a report and it is determined that the alleged perpetrator is not the parent or guardian, Child Welfare Services will advise the person to report to the parent and advise the parent to report to the police. Child Welfare Services will also report to the police to ensure the report was made and will also advise the Regional Manager of Day Care Services that a report was received by Child Welfare Services and the police.

- ▶ Once the Child Welfare Services worker has reported to the police and the Regional Manager of Day Care Services, the police are responsible for conducting the investigation; however, the investigation is usually conducted in cooperation with Child Welfare Services.
- ▶ The Regional Manager of Day Care Services will contact the police to determine the status of the investigation. Depending on the information received from the police, the Regional Manager of Day Care Services will recommend the appropriate course of action with respect to suspension of staff in a day care centre, suspension of service in a centre or family day home, closure of a centre or home, and notification of parents of other children. The Regional Manager of Day Care Services is also advised to consult with Child Welfare Services.

3. What To Report

If you think there is a reason to be concerned about a child, you will need to provide as much of the following information as possible:

- Name, age, birth date, sex, racial origin and address of child concerned
- Names, addresses of parents or guardians
- Names and address of the alleged perpetrator, if known, and any other information which may assist in locating or identifying that person
- Full details of the incident or situation which precipitated the report. Be as specific as possible. Make notes on details or events or behaviours that caused concern.

4. What Happens After a Report is Made

Social workers with Child Welfare Services designated to receive reports are trained to investigate and assess the need for intervention. Urgent matters are referred immediately to the police or to an after-hours worker in the district office. Non-emergency situations are handled by telephone counselling and a referral to the district office for investigation.

If the child is not in need of protective services but the family members indicate there are problems with which they would like help, the Child Welfare Services worker will assist in obtaining services from an appropriate community agency. If the child is in need of protective services, the Child Welfare Services worker has a range of service options from which to choose. These options include: referral of the child and family to an

appropriate community service; direct provision of services to the child and family; entering into an agreement with the parents to remove the child from the home temporarily; seeking a court order to apprehend the child; or apprehension of the child because of immediate and substantial risk.

5. Responding to the Abused Child

- If a child discloses abuse, listen to the child. Take the child to a quiet place and allow the child to tell what happened in his or her own words.
- Reassure the child. Let the child know you believe what you have heard. Children rarely lie, particularly about sexual abuse. Comfort the child by saying that it was a good thing for the child to tell you.
- Remain calm. Do not over-react or show horror or anger or any other reaction that would lead the child to believe the abuse or neglect was his fault. Tell the child it is not his fault. Support and acknowledge the child's feelings - whether anger, fear, sadness or anxiety - and assure the child that you will do something to help.
- Call Child Welfare Services for help as soon as possible. A worker will advise you what to do next.

6. What You Should Look For

Child abuse and neglect take many forms. "Abuse" can mean actively hurting a child or depriving the child of affection and acceptance. "Neglect" means failing to take proper care of a child. Abuse and neglect can range from constantly humiliating a child, to denying the nurturing he needs, from hard shaking or slapping, to the sexual abuse of a child. It also means doing nothing to stop abuse or neglect from happening - in other words "permitting" abuse is against the law.

Your first indication that a child may be in need of protective service may be your observation of the relationship between the parent(s) and child. If you "sense" something is wrong, trust your instincts. Do not over-react, but do watch the situation closely. Look for indicators and if a child or parent provides information, contact Child Welfare Services.

Child abuse and neglect fall into four basic categories: physical, sexual, emotional and neglect. The form of the maltreatment in a particular case may be a single form of abuse or a combination of abuse and neglect.

The child may:

- be anxious, depressed, unhappy
- have poor relationships with peers
- show extremes of behaviour - may be very passive or aggressive, outgoing or withdrawn or swing between two opposite extremes of behaviour
- be frequently absent
- be over anxious to please
- show distrust of others
- have low self-esteem
- fear and avoid physical contact with adults.

The adult may:

- suggest or indicate loneliness, isolation, carrying a heavy burden of responsibility for the child
- react with hostility/anger/indifference when you discuss concerns regarding the child
- have been abused as a child
- misuse drugs and/or alcohol.

If any of these indicators are present, monitor the situation carefully. Look for the more specific indicators listed in the following section and decide whether a report should be made immediately.

If under any circumstances, a child tells you that he or she is being abused or neglected, believe the child and take action!

Remember to write down any information you have related to the suspicions: physical signs, conversations you had with the parent or child, the date, time and any other details.

The charts presented on the following pages show the indicators of specific forms of abuse and neglect. In any given situation, the abuse and neglect may be of one specific type or may be a combination of several of the types described.

INDICATORS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

The Child

Physical signs might include:

- bruises and welts
- bite marks
- burns
- lacerations and abrasions
- dislocation of shoulders, hips, etc.
- head injuries

The child may:

- be wary of physical contact with adults
- seem afraid of parent or other person
- be frightened in the face of adult disapproval
- be apprehensive when others cry
- show extremes of behavior - aggressive/withdrawn
- be over-anxious to please
- may approach any adult including strangers

The Adult may:

- be angry, impatient; frequently lose or almost lose control
- appear unconcerned about child's condition
- view child as bad or as the cause of life's problems
- resist discussion of child's condition or family situation
- view questions with suspicion
- use discipline inappropriate to child's age, condition and situation
- offer illogical, contradictory, unconvincing or no explanation of injuries
- show poor understanding of normal child development (for example, may expect adult-like, mature behavior from a young child)

INDICATORS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

The Child

Child's appearance may not indicate or suggest the extent of the difficulty. Child may appear clean, well groomed and well nourished.

Child's facial expression and body carriage may indicate sadness, depression, timidity or held-back anger.

The child may:

- appear overly compliant, passive, shy
- show episodes of very aggressive, demanding and angry behavior
- fear failure, have trouble concentrating or learning and give up easily
- be either boastful or negative about himself
- constantly apologize

The Adult may:

- blame or belittle child in public and at home
- withhold comfort when child is frightened or distressed
- treat other children in the family differently and better, showing more acceptance and loving, and less criticism
- tend to describe child in negative ways: "stupid," "bad," "trouble-maker;" and see failure or poor future for child
- hold child responsible for parent's difficulties and disappointments
- identify child with disliked relatives

INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

The Child

Physical evidence of sexual abuse is rare. Often with young children, abuse is not intercourse but touching, which may leave no physical signs. Where physical evidence is present it may be:

- torn, stained or bloody clothing
- pain or itching in genital area or throat, difficulty going to bathroom or swallowing
- bruises, bleeding or swelling of genital, rectal or anal areas
- vaginal odour or discharge

The child may:

- display unusual interest in sexual matters
 - use language and make drawings that are sexually explicit
 - fantasize excessively
 - show fear of closed spaces
 - resist undressing or diaper changes
 - masturbate excessively
 - exhibit seductive behavior
-

The Adult may:

- often be domineering but emotionally weak
 - suggest or indicate marital or relationship difficulties with adults
 - indicate own social isolation, loneliness, especially as a single parent
 - cling to child, both physically and emotionally; hold and touch the child in an inappropriate way
 - tend to blame others for life's problems and child's sexual behavior - may even accuse child of causing sexual abuse
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INDICATORS OF NEGLECT

The Child may:

- be underweight by more than 30%, and gain weight when offered proper nutrition
 - show improvement of developmental delays following proper stimulation and care
 - demonstrate signs of deprivation: cradle cap, severe diaper rash, diarrhea, vomiting, anemia, recurring respiratory problems
 - be consistently dirty or dressed inappropriately for weather, or wear torn clothing
 - often be hungry or thirsty
 - often be tired or listless
 - demand much physical contact and attention
 - assume role of parent or adult in the family
 - lack proper medical and dental care
-

The Adult may:

- maintain a chaotic home life with little evidence of health routines
 - not supervise child for long periods of time or when child is involved in potentially dangerous activity
 - leave child in the care of inappropriate persons
 - give child inappropriate food, drink, medicine
 - consistently bring child early and pick up late
 - be apathetic towards child's progress, hard to reach by phone and fail to keep appointments to discuss child and concerns
 - overwork or exploit child
 - show evidence of apathy, feelings of futility
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7. Role of Caregivers and Staff in Preventing Abuse

Caregivers can provide a role model for parents by demonstrating appropriate interaction with children, guiding behavior, and providing a safe and suitable physical environment.

Child abuse or neglect may be prevented by learning about the child's family and being sensitive to any circumstances in the family or characteristics of the parent or child which might contribute to child abuse or neglect.

Caregivers can help children learn about their bodies and their feelings, without creating fear and suspicion of everyone who touches or speaks to them.

Centres and agencies must check references for employees and providers carefully. Over-reliance on police security checks fosters a false sense of security because only a small percentage of abusers have previous records.

Centre staff and family day home providers must carefully monitor friends or family who may be in a centre or home while children are being cared for. Staff and providers should know that activities such as toileting, diapering and bathing have the potential for abuse to occur or for actions to be misinterpreted, resulting in an accusation of abuse. Therefore, persons other than centre caregivers or providers should not perform these activities.